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AUTHOR Schnell, James A.
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ABSTRACT

Cross-cultural awareness in the multicultural classroom has become an important issue in recent years for two main reasons: a continued increase in the number of international students studying in the United States and an increased emphasis on faculty skills for dealing with minorities in the classroom. Faculty approaches to maintaining cultural equilibrium in the classroom are frequently mistaken for cross-cultural insensitivity. A self-reporting instrument can help faculty gauge their awareness of primary areas of cross-cultural difference in the classroom. Culture bound areas are areas that can be interpreted and emphasized in significantly different ways depending upon an individual's cultural background. The survey instrument offered in this paper is based on an outline of culture bound areas which was created by the National Association for Developmental Education. Faculty indicate their responses to each statement in each area. The instrument focuses on teacher expectations, standards, personal perspectives, approaches in common situations, and how these areas may benefit or detract from the classroom environment. Specific analysis of the following survey areas can be beneficial: (1) teacher-student communication should be based on formal (rather than informal) interaction; (2) emotionally charged issues and conflict should be handled by never losing control over oneself or the classroom; (3) humor should be used; and (4) students should be treated the same, whether the teacher likes them individually or not. (Twenty-eight references are attached.) (RAE)

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SELF ASSESSMENT OF CROSS-CULTURAL SENSITIVITY FOR FACULTY WHO TEACH IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

James A. Schnell
Assistant Professor
University of Cincinnati

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SELF ASSESSMENT OF CROSS-CULTURAL SENSITIVITY FOR FACULTY WHO TEACH IN THE MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM

"Today we are faced with the pre-eminent fact that, if civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships--the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together and work together, in the same world, at peace."

Franklin D. Roosevelt
April 13, 1945

The typical American classroom in higher education has changed significantly over the past 30 years. Increased world trade has brought an influx of international students to study at American colleges and universities. The civil rights movement and educational reform in the U.S. have drastically increased the number of American minority students who have gone on to college. Both situations have caused a need for greater sensitivity of cross-cultural concerns in the multicultural classroom. The former situation emphasizing cultural differences and the latter situation emphasizing subcultural differences.

The author is an assistant professor of interpersonal communication at the University of Cincinnati. Cross-cultural communication is his primary research area. He has had the opportunity to teach students of various cultural backgrounds in a variety of cultural settings. The cultural settings have included rural and urban universities, a foreign university (Beijing, China), different work settings, and the prison system in Ohio. These experiences have helped him better understand the relevance and possible application of

cross-cultural approaches.

Cross-cultural awareness in the multicultural classroom has become an important issue in recent years for two main reasons: a continued increase of international students studying in the United States and an increased emphasis on faculty skills for dealing with minorities in the classroom. Regarding the latter, acts of racism have increased significantly on college campuses during recent years and minorities have responded by emphasizing the need for cross-cultural sensitivity in and out of the classroom. It is the author's contention faculty approaches to maintain cultural equilibrium in the classroom are frequently mistaken for cross-cultural insensitivity.

The primary objective of this paper is to help faculty evaluate cross-cultural awareness in the classroom and to provide a starting point for improvement in this area (but not necessarily indicate "right/wrong" approaches). This end is stressed through the use of a self-reporting instrument which faculty can use to gauge their awareness of primary areas of cross-cultural difference in the classroom.

The survey which follows is entitled "Culture Bound Areas for Personal Reflection." These culture bound areas are areas that can be interpreted and emphasized in significantly different ways depending upon an individual's cultural background. The survey is based on an outline of culture bound areas which was created by the National Association for Developmental Education.

SA - strongly agree
A - agree
N - neutral
D - disagree
SD - strongly disagree

CULTURAL-BOUND AREAS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION:

I. EXPECTATIONS AND STANDARDS	SA	A	N	D	SD
A. Teacher-student communication should be based on formal (rather than informal) interaction.	5	4	3	2	1
B. Dress and cleanliness is important.	5	4	3	2	1
C. If a student is academically unprepared, it is primarily his/her own fault.	5	4	3	2	1
D. Students should have alot of free time.	5	4	3	2	1
E. Respect for authority is important.	5	4	3	2	1
F. If a student is caught in an academically dishonest action, he/she should be expelled from school.	5	4	3	2	1
II. APPROACHES	SA	A	N	D	SD
A. I handle emotionally charged issues and conflict by never losing control of myself or my control over the classroom.	5	4	3	2	1
B. Humor is essential in the classroom	5	4	3	2	1
C. I enjoy some students less than others.	5	4	3	2	1
III. PREFERENCES	SA	A	N	D	SD
A. It is important for me to treat students the same. They should never know if I really like them individually or not.	5	4	3	2	1
B. I prefer group (instead of individual) learning activities.	5	4	3	2	1
C. I prefer docile (instead of aggressive) students.	5	4	3	2	1

This is a self-reporting instrument. Faculty indicate their responses to each statement in each area: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Again, these are areas which are frequently interpreted and emphasized differently depending on the individual's cultural background.

When used in a workshop setting, this survey can help participants gauge their cross-cultural sensitivity by comparing/contrasting their perceptions with others. This instrument focuses on teacher expectations, standards, personal perspectives, approaches in common situations, and how these areas can benefit or detract from the classroom environment. Use of the instrument can be prefaced with a description of theoretical concerns which underscore the relevance of areas to be reviewed. Primary benefits from this experience can be realized through discussion of how participants can use the self assessment results to improve their teaching approaches based on increased awareness of varying cross-cultural perspectives which frequently exist in the multicultural classroom.

The survey is helpful as it can help faculty members increase their awareness of areas which are commonly misunderstood among faculty members and international students. For instance, section I statement F states "If a student is caught in an academically dishonest action, he/she should be expelled from school." This can be a troubling area as what is "academically dishonest" in one

culture can be a preferred approach in another culture. Plagiarism in the American culture is a serious offense which can result in expulsion from school. Plagiarism in China is commonly practiced since "no one owns an idea as their very own." Thus, books are frequently copied from since "ideas belong to the masses."

Awareness of these areas is also beneficial when working with the variety of subcultures which comprise the United States culture. Misunderstandings among American subcultures are very similar to misunderstandings among international cultures. Both types of misunderstandings are based on differing frames of reference. These differing frames of reference do not necessarily indicate opposite interpretations of the culture bound areas, rather they imply various interpretations on the same continuum (but differing in varying degrees depending on the cultural backgrounds compared).

There has been a marked increase of racism on college campuses across the United States. These situations have generally involved blatant actions exhibiting little, if any, understanding of cultural backgrounds other than dominant culture white America. Although this is a serious problem, and one which could become worse before it improves, we obviously cannot focus total attention on it in our classrooms. But, <u>how</u> we teach our classes can be more important (with this issue) than what we are teaching. That is, actions speak louder than words. Thus, a multicultural

classroom environment which is sensitive to various cultural and subcultural backgrounds is going to help provide considerable understanding for students of all backgrounds. Obviously the faculty member has a direct influence on this classroom environment.

Culture is the backdrop within which teaching and learning takes place. We all use our cultural background to "filter" what we are perceiving in the classroom. Thus, the American faculty member can actually experience "culture shock" in his/her own classroom without leaving the country.

Culture shock occurs when we experience confusion, anger, or despair as a result of unsuccessful attempts to make sense of cultural practices which are foreign to us. This usually occurs when we are outside of our own culture (in another country) but it can happen when dealing with culturally different individuals in our own culture. Culture shock usually involves four stages: the honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adjustment stages.

The honeymoon stage occurs during our initial interactions with a new culture when we are intrigued with new places and new ways of living. The crisis stage occurs when we encounter a situation which we do not know how to resolve and we become frustrated. The recovery stage occurs when we learn how to resolve the situation. The adjustment stage occurs after we have resolved the conflict and begin to enjoy the culture again.

The aforementioned situation involving differing views on academic dishonesty (between the U.S. and China) exemplifies a culture shock situation which the author experienced while teaching in China. First, he enjoyed learning new things about the Chinese culture (honeymoon). Second, he observed students plagiarizing from outside sources when writing their papers (crisis). Third, he found plagiarism is a common practice in Chineseuniversities (recovery). Fourth, he told his students this was against the way he had been trained in the U.S. but that he would adopt the Chinese approach on the issue since he was in China (adjustment).

The author has experienced paralleled situations in the U.S. when working with culturally different students. The following four steps describe such a case. First, the author had two Vietnamese students who were new to the U.S. He was interested in getting to know them as he is interested in Vietnamese history and they were "boat people" who had escaped from Vietnam (honeymoon). Second, their understanding of American culture was minimal and they had great difficulty understanding various assignments in the classroom (crisis). Third, the author modified their assignments, basing them on universal understandings, so the Vietnamese students could complete the course objectives (recovery). Fourth, the author and the students achieved an academic basis for common understanding (adjustment).

There are many rules of interpersonal interaction to

acknowledge when considering cross-cultural communication. One such model involves high context communication processes and low context communication processes. In high context cultures speakers present messages indirectly and let meanings evolve. Much is communicated through paralanguage cues and gesturing. High context cultures are located mainly in the Orient.

Speakers in low context cultures are more direct when presenting messages. Low context cultures are found mainly in the United States and European countries. Awareness of these perspectives is based heavily on both verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Obviously there is much room for confusion and incorrect interpretation of intentions.

Different perceptions of the culture bound areas are not always a matter of differing values. Values can be similar but the <u>expression</u> of these values, based on cultural communicative norms, can vary significantly. Cross-cultural understanding can become especially difficult because different perceptions of culture bound areas can be a matter of differing values <u>and</u> differing communication processes. Thus, a high degree of tolerance is beneficial.

It is a myth to believe it is enough to treat culturally (or subculturally) different students like they are from your own culture (or subculture). Such a view is too ethnocentric. A basic goal can be to create a classroom environment which meets culturally different students "halfway." <u>Intentions</u> to establish a clear

understanding can serve as a base for clear understanding. The following recommendations, general and specific, can help enhance such intentions.

Generally speaking, awareness of the affective, cognitive, and interpersonal domains of cross-cultural interaction can provide a general basis for improved relations. The affective domain involves acceptance and respect of other cultural backgrounds. The cognitive domain emphasizes knowledge and understanding of other cultural backgrounds. The interpersonal domain stresses the development of communication skills for interacting with various cultural backgrounds.

A specific approach starts with faculty members tape recording their lectures for personal review. Particular areas for evaluation include the use of sarcasm, language norms, vocal animation, supporting statements through repitition & substantiation, level of vocabulary, pronunciation & articulation, and rate of speech. All of these areas can be variables in cross-cultural interaction.

Specific analysis of the following survey areas can also be beneficial.

I. A. Teacher-student communication should be based on formal (rather than informal) interaction.
II. A. I handle emotionally charged issues and conflict by never losing control of myself or my control over the classroom.
II. B. Humor is essential in the classroom.
III. A. It is important for me to treat students the same. They should never know if I really like them individually or not.

These areas can be evaluated using taped lectures. Again,

it is important to realize these areas can vary from culture to culture. In doing this type of evaluation one should consider how his/her approach fits within his/her own culture/subculture and how his/her approach could possibly conflict with other cultural/subcultural approaches.

The need for cross-cultural sensitivity in the multicultural classroom is a need which will doubtfully ever be met. But evaluation of faculty awareness in this area is the first step towards gauging our weaknesses (and strengths) regarding how we can promote a better understanding of not just what we teach but <u>how</u> we teach it.

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